



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 9, 2005

Ms. Margo M. Kaiser
Staff Attorney, Open Records Unit
Texas Workforce Commission
101 East 15th Street
Austin, Texas 78778-0001

OR2005-01187

Dear Ms. Kaiser:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 221268.

The Texas Workforce Commission (the "commission") received a request for the unemployment compensation claim records of a named person. The commission states that it will release all of the requested information except for the submitted information, which it asserts is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.107 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure information protected by the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made "for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services" to the client governmental body.¹ TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). Third, the privilege applies only to

¹ The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is acting in a capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in a capacity other than that of attorney). Because government attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, including as administrators, investigators, or managers, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element.

communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives.² TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body seeking to establish that a communication is protected by the attorney-client privilege must inform this office of the identity and capacity of each individual involved in the communication. Finally, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a communication that is confidential. *Id.* 503(b)(1). A confidential communication is a communication that was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.” *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Whether a communication meets the definition of a confidential communication depends on the intent of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, no writ). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You inform us that the submitted information was prepared by commission appeals attorneys for the sole use of the Commissioners. You state that the commission appeals attorneys select the facts that impact on the legal issues presented and prepare a “Case Analysis” for the benefit of the Commissioners. You further state that the case analysis “(1) advises the Commissioners of any items of testimony, evidence, or investigation which the attorney believes could or should have a bearing on those legal issues; (2) evaluates the decision of the hearing officer with an eye toward the legal sufficiency of that officer’s rationale; and (3) recommends to the Commission a decision based on the attorney’s legal opinion.” Finally, you state that the communications are made in confidence, are intended for the sole use of the Commissioners, and are not shared or distributed to others. You also inform us that the duties of the staff attorneys consist of providing legal advice and opinion to the respective commissioner and that such communications are made “in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to this attorney’s client.” Based on our review of your representations, arguments, and the submitted information, we find that you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the submitted records.

² Specifically, the privilege applies only to confidential communications between the client or a representative of the client and the client’s lawyer or a representative of the lawyer; between the lawyer and the lawyer’s representative; by the client or a representative of the client, or the client’s lawyer or a representative of the lawyer, to a lawyer or representative of a lawyer representing another party in a pending action and concerning a matter of common interest therein; between representatives of the client or between the client and a representative of the client; or among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client. *See* TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E); *see also id.* 503(a)(2), (a)(4) (defining “representative of the client,” “representative of the lawyer”).

Accordingly, we conclude that the commission may withhold the submitted records in their entirety pursuant to section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. As our ruling on this issue is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within thirty calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within ten calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't

Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within ten calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David R. Saldivar
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DRS/seg

Ref: ID# 221268

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Karen K. Fitzgerald
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(w/o enclosures)